

Sunday Morning Raspberry Picking

The rusty Chevy pickup brakes, nestling.
 Before the engine cuts, "You better believe—"
 Drawls in hillbilly from the radio
 And hangs a severed edge on the silence.
 Clouds of road-dust settle. They are raised
 Again when the next wheels mutter along the grooves.

This is no Lovers' Lane: the cars and trucks
 Queue up bumper to bumper, funeral-style,
 Thick sheers of mist lining the rear windows
 In privacy the sun will soon dissolve.
 Though friends and neighbours, all sit contained
 Like focused athletes hunkered on a track.

At seven sharp, the owner's son unbolts
 And swivels the chain-link gate. A dozen engines
 Kick in, and the procession lumbers over
 Hummocky ground, prints ancient mud in potholes,
 And congregates at the first long bramble row
 Where another son waits with baskets and directions.

True hand-me-downs of battered lime-green cardboard,
 The baskets keep the stains of last year's harvest
 Like frescoes cast by floods. Only slowly
 The deeper red of fresh pickings rises
 Over the fringe: small, edible briar roses,
 The raspberries hide their blush with screens of thorns.

It is a sacrifice. Farmers owl-eyed from haying
 Could hug their beds like cut grass; wives don't need
 A rouge of stings and scrapes; nobody ever
 Needs raspberries. Yet, a hunger burrows
 Beneath their needs to sound an urge that will not
 Be stilled until it surfeits on their pains.

Light sharpens and begins to trim their shadows
 As mists of chatter rise from little circles
 Throughout the patch. Now, from the shadowed grooves
 Of heavy faces, a holiday laughter flashes
 Too quick to lighten them, and focuses
 Clutches of sweet, perishable rubies.

John Reibetanz